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Chief, Soviet Division

6 July 1953

Assistant Director, Current Intelligence

Roundup on East Germany

1. The Deputy Director (Intelligence) requests that we prepare a factual summary of the East Germany situation, i.e., the East Germany riots, demonstrations, etc., and their aftermath, for his use in forthcoming discussions in the National Security Council Planning Board. The deadline for the roundup is close of business, 6 July 1953. Classification of the paper is "Secret".

2. The roundup should follow the outline given below:

- I. Nature and extent of riots and demonstrations (i.e., firm, factual data as opposed to rumors; cities, factories, etc.)
- II. Soviet reaction (i.e., specific acts or statements made by Soviet officials, instead of broad generalizations).
- III. East Germany capabilities with specific reference to the KVP and VP (i.e., their reliability as demonstrated, number of defectors, etc.)
- IV. East Germany government reaction (treated as paragraph II. above in terms of specific acts and statements).
- V. Soviet policy reaction, if such can be elicited from specific acts and statements.
- VI. Other reactions. (Here a specific statement with reference to each of the Satellite governments would be in order. General statements would suffice for world-wide non-Communist reactions.)

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1. Nature and extent of the riots and demonstrations:

The demonstrations in East Germany on 16-17 June were of sufficient magnitude to bring the entire nation under Soviet military control and to disrupt communications for several days. The focal point of these disorders was East Berlin, where a demonstration of workers from the Stalinallee construction project set off the chain reaction of disturbances on 16 June. The events of this demonstration are as follows:

- A. With a call for a 10 percent decrease in production norms, about 5,000 workers at the Stalinallee project started demonstrating at about noon. (Some 2-3,000 Stalinallee workers had actually started striking on the preceding day at 0900).
- B. The demonstrators marched to the vicinity of the Leipzigerstrasse government offices where two East German ministers, Rau and Selbmann, attempted to pacify and disperse them. The crowds shouted down Selbmann and, at about 1400, a call for all-German elections and the resignation of the government was made.
- C. The demonstrators then moved to Alexanderplatz and called for a general strike.
- D. At about 1500 the demonstration ended.
- E. At about 1700 a delegation of East Berlin workers called at RIAS, West Berlin radio, requesting assistance in spreading their call to East Berliners to go on general strike the following day.
- F. Demonstrations by scattered groups of East Berliners continued until 0030, 17 June.
- G. The demonstrations were continued with increased force and intensity on 17 June, spreading throughout East Germany. East Berlin was again the central point of activities, though strikes and demonstrations of greater magnitude occurred at at least two points elsewhere in East Germany, Magdeburg and Halle. The following events occurred in East Berlin on the 17th:
 1. At 0500 RIAS called on the East Berlin population to support the demonstrators.
 2. The Soviet occupation of the city commenced very early, with tank units being observed as early as 0430.
 3. About 17,000 demonstrators were marching toward the government office district by 0630.
 4. Some elevated train traffic had been halted by 1100.
 5. During the morning the demonstrations became violent. Police were beaten and thrown into a canal; several buildings, kiosks and police shacks were burned; police cars were overturned and burned; there was looting.
 6. By 1200 East Berlin's elevated and subway trains were at a standstill.

7. Shortly after noon East German police started using small arms fire to scatter the mobs, and during the afternoon both Soviet and German forces employed firearms.
 8. At 1345 martial law was announced.
 9. Strong forces of Soviet armored cars, tanks and troops moved into East Berlin from East Germany during the afternoon.
 10. At 1800, the streets were still filled with crowds (numbering about 100,000) and two large fires were in progress.
 11. The streets were still crowded at 1900 including large numbers of Soviet tanks and troops.
 12. By 2015 order had been largely restored and only people's police and Soviet troops were on the streets.
 13. At 2100 the curfew went into effect.
- H. Demonstrations and riots occurred simultaneously throughout East Germany. Disorder was reported from nearly every city of East Germany, but demonstrations, strikes and/or riots have been confirmed in only the following places: Aus (strikes in the uranium mines), Berlin (see above), Bitterfeld, Brandenburg, Chemnitz, Cottbus, Dresden, Erfurt, Gera, Goerlitz, Gross Beeren, Halle (where the prison was stormed and prisoners released), Hennigsdorf (strikes in the steel mills), Hillersleben, Jena, Koenigswusterhausen, Leipzig, Ludwigsfeld, Magdeburg, Merseburg (strikes at the Leunawerke), Nachterstedt (burning of briquette factory), Neuruppin, Rostock, Schkopau (strikes at the Buna Werke), Schwerin, Torgau, Warnemuende, Wismar, and Zwickau.

It has been confirmed that the following major plants were inoperative because of strikes:

1. Oberspreewerke Cable Works, Berlin.
2. Karl Liebknecht Transformer Works, Berlin.
3. Treptow Communications Equipment Works, Berlin.
4. Hennigsdorf Steel Mills.
5. Buna Works, Schkopau.
6. Leuna Works, Merseburg.
7. Nachterstedt Briquette Factory.

II. Soviet reaction:

A. Official:

The only official Soviet reaction to the riots was a 20 June letter from the Soviet Commander in Berlin to his allied counterparts. He held that not only had the western powers failed to keep agents from crossing into East Berlin in connection with the riots but that US officers in full uniform actually directed the rioters.

B. Semi-official soviet reaction - East German propaganda.

- a. US bore the main blame. Reports of US officers in full uniform directing rioters, US planes dropping pamphlets to them, US radio cars issuing instructions, MSA funds used.
- b. British and French authorities also blamed, but later propaganda gave them subsidiary role.
- c. Adenauer, Kaiser, Ollenhauer, Reuter all subject to bitter attack. Nazi remnants also blamed.
- d. Western responsibility for agents an excuse of Soviet for not resuming normal communications and travel in Berlin. (This charge in 20 June letter of Soviet military commander in Berlin.)

2. Western motives were attacked.

- a. Tied to Korea. Hand of Western powers seen in both riots and Rhee prisoner release.
- b. West was frightened by prospect of GDR reforms destroying Adenauer war policy, and tried to sabotage them.
- c. Comparison made with Hitler coup and with "invasion" of North Korea.
- d. West was trying to prevent understanding between peoples, was even lighting the fuse of a new war.

3. There were admissions that the workers were in some cases misled.

- a. The party was blamed for letting this happen; it had lost touch with the workers, failed to heed their demands.
- b. Now the workers were protesting the attempt to deceive them.
- c. The misled workers would not be punished.

would not stop 4. There were some indications ~~of the effect which~~ ^{that} the riots ~~had on~~ future reforms.

- a. The riots will not deter determination to carry out reform. But insistence that the riots did not force the reforms; point out that reforms started before riots.
- b. Soviet peace policy has made possible reduction in military and in heavy industry - butter, not guns. This will permit more consumer goods. Nevertheless high productivity still essential.
- c. Propaganda continues to stress examples of applications of reforms - return of farms and private business.

C. Semi-official Soviet reaction - Soviet Propaganda.

1. Moscow's immediate reaction was to publicize East German reports and comments.

2. Soviet restraint in initial comment became much less evident in subsequent propaganda. The 23 June Pravda lead article -- "Failure of Foreign Hirelings' Adventure in Berlin" -- apparently was first independent editorial comment. In general, Moscow's line was a recapitulation of East German charges.
3. Notes on Moscow's attention to the event:
 - a. On 25 June public "protest" meetings were organized in Moscow for the first time since the Kope riots (May 1952) and only the third time since World War II. The widely publicized meetings voiced faith in the German workers even while repeatedly calling on them to rally around the SED and the GDR.
 - b. Comment on the riots was heavy to the home audience, and news items gave them unusual attention.
 - c. The meetings and propaganda appeared designed to establish the meaning of the German events for the Soviet people, - giving them assurances as to the stability of the GDR - but at the same time warning of the dangers of a new war by explicit designation of the riots as a provocation to a new war.
 - d. Moscow's heavy attention to the event in German-language broadcasts, in contrast to Moscow's usual treatment of unfavorable Satellite developments, appears intended as a reaffirmation of Soviet support of the GDR.

III. East German capabilities:

In the face of popular uprising, the East German military (KVP) and police proved to be both inadequate and unreliable forces. Intervention of the people's police during the initial period was sporadic and half-hearted. For many recruits of the young people's police, it was the first exposure to violence and the necessity of using arms against a mob, and their reactions were varied. Many feared for their lives, and for this reason fired indiscriminately into the crowds. Others defected to West Berlin. No doubt many were swayed by sympathy with the rioters and revulsion at firing on their fellow-countrymen.

No accurate figures as to the number of KVP or police defectors during the riots are available, but it is believed that 150-200 came over to West Berlin during this period. These defectors were probably from the units originally charged with the maintenance of order who were surprised by the unexpected ferocity of the demonstrators. There is no reliable evidence of widespread desertions and mutinies among the KVP or the people's police units. The KVP forces were confined to their barracks and not committed until 18 June, when Soviet forces had gotten control of the situation. This suggests that the Soviets considered these forces unreliable or inadequate to the situation. When committed, the KVP were used primarily as border guards.

On the basis of their performance, it does not appear that East Germany's military and police forces have either the physical capability or morale required to maintain order without Soviet help. The breakdown of KVP morale under the stress of a major war is probable. It is questionable whether the KVP could be depended upon to keep order if the Soviet occupation armies were otherwise committed.

IV. East German government reaction:

- A. The East German authorities reacted to the riots by issuing a series of decrees and announcements, most of them designed to placate the population. These measures were as follows:
 1. At 1630 on 16 June the East German government announced that the 10 percent increase in workers' production norms should be considered cancelled as a compulsory measure and that future norm increases would be dependent upon the workers' voluntary consent.
 2. At 2000 on 16 June Minister President Grotewohl and his deputy, Ulbricht, addressed a meeting of Socialist Unity Party members, promising "further far-reaching measures" to correct past mistakes.
 3. At 1530 on 17 June the government issued an announcement calling on the people to maintain order and go back to work, promising punishment to the perpetrators of the riots, and calling upon the mass organizations to support the government.
 4. At 2200 on 17 June the government issued an announcement stating that "agents of foreign powers, fascists and other reactionary elements" had started the demonstrations.
 5. At 2317 on 17 June the government announced that normal work would be resumed on the following day.
 6. At 2346 on 17 June the government announced that the riots ended "in the complete collapse of the adventure" and that further disturbances would result in severe punishment.
 7. At 1020 on 18 June the Socialist Unity Party Executive pledged party efforts in restoring normal operations and ferreting out "provocateurs."
 8. The Socialist Unity Party's Central Committee on 21 June announced the following proposed improvements: reduction in norms, reinstatement of train fare reductions for workers, increase in pensions and accident benefits, liberalization of the sick leave policy, restoration of social insurance benefits to all citizens, improvement of housing in industrial areas, improvement of sanitary conditions in nationalized industries, increase in the supply of working clothes, and discontinuation of daily power cuts.
 9. Grotewohl on 24 June said a new wage policy was needed, that there was "no need to build up a heavy industry" on the scale planned, and that the government was committed to the fight for German unity.

10. On 25 June the government decreed the following: abolition of work norm increases, improvement of the food supply, improvement of the supply of working clothes, improvement of the supply of industrial goods, improvement of housing, "further development of peasant holdings," reductions in agricultural delivery quotas, and increase of pensions and social welfare benefits.
11. On 26 June, at a staged demonstration in East Berlin, Grotewohl promised that the government would rectify its errors and improve the living standard of the workers.
12. On 26 June, Deputy Minister President Rau, speaking at Chemnitz, declared that the government would concentrate on the consumer goods and export industries at the expense of heavy industry.
13. Minister of Justice Pechner announced that no special courts had been set up to deal with the "provocateurs" of 17 June and that only "persons guilty of crimes" would be punished.
14. The government announced on 27 June that releases of food and industrial goods from the state reserves were possible because of reduced requirements of the armed forces.
15. On 30 June the State Commission for Trade and Supply announced that meat ration cards would be fully honored and that fish would not be substituted for meat.

V. Soviet policy reaction:

- A. The immediate Soviet reaction was a firm show of military strength, combined, however, with a desire to avoid shooting whenever possible. The cautious, slow lifting of martial law indicates a Soviet desire to return to normalcy as soon as possible without renewing the danger of new outbreaks. Soviet authorities in Berlin have so far retained most of the severe restrictions on travel between the sectors of the city.
- B. The USSR has not yet showed its hand on any new long range policy line in reaction to the German developments. However, the recall of top diplomats and particularly the reported recall of Top Soviet officials in Germany may have been for the purpose of re-examining present policy or gauging western reaction to the new Soviet tactics to date.

VI. Other reactions:

A. Satellite Reaction

The official reaction of all the Satellite governments to the East German riots has been consistent. On 18 and 19 June all the Satellites, except Rumania which did not report the riots until 21 June, carried the standard Communist version. This alleged that provocateurs and foreign agents had taken advantage of peaceful worker demonstrations in East Berlin against an increase in work norms in order to create riots. Subsequently Party propaganda and Satellite leaders have continued to refer

any easing of international tension and citing the provocations of the "imperialist hirelings" as necessary for increased vigilance.

US observers in Eastern Europe have noted no marked increase of security precautions following the riots.

Press reports of the movement of a Soviet MVD division to Pilsen on 26 June have been denied by American Embassy officials in Prague who visited Pilsen on 27-28 June. Report that Polish troops, brought into Goerlitz to help quell the East German riots, joined the demonstrators is unconfirmed. American Embassy officials in Warsaw who made trips through central, northern, and southwestern Poland between 20 and 28 June noted no evidence of popular demonstrations or unusual security precautions. Similarly, there has been no confirmation of reported Soviet troop movements from East Germany into Poland to quell alleged Polish uprisings. Soviet troops have been observed moving out of East Berlin and other East German cities beginning in the afternoon of 27 June, apparently to return to home stations following the restoration of order. The despatching of troop trains toward the East German Polish border, although not yet confirmed, could be in preparation for the normal rotation of troops between the USSR and East Germany which usually begins about this time of year. On 3 July the Polish Press Agency denied flatly that any security measures had been taken in Poland and stated that conditions were calm.

Following the riots, the Hungarian, Albanian, and Rumanian governments announced popular concessions designed to improve living conditions and bolster morale. While the timing of these concessions may have been partially influenced by the events in East Germany, the nature and extent of the Hungarian Party and government reorganization, coinciding with the announced intent of the regime to slow down the tempo of socialization, appear to be more a reflection of the Kremlin's new conciliatory tactics applied to Eastern Europe. Moreover failure of the Hungarian Parliament to meet on June 17 as prescribed by the Constitution, suggests that the changes in Hungary were being formulated prior to the outbreak of the East German riots.

While there is some evidence that the Albanian decree cancelling agricultural debts for the years 1949-1953 was hastily announced on 28 June, it is not clear to what extent, if any, its timing was influenced by the East German riots. In Rumania, the plans to release additional foodstuffs to the people appears to be in preparation for the meeting of the World Federation of Democratic Youth Congress beginning 25 July. However, several recent concessions to the peasants are in line with conciliatory moves in Hungary, Albania and East Germany.

Czechoslovakia, Poland and Bulgaria have not made similar concessions to date nor has there been any preparatory propaganda buildup. The Czechoslovak government, in fact, has recently announced additional harsh measures against its workers to combat absenteeism and labor turnover.

The major concessions which the Hungarian government has promised to its people, are being widely publicized in the other Satellite newspapers and this suggests that other Eastern European governments will adopt similar measures.

B. Yugoslav reaction:

The major Yugoslavian propaganda theme has been that the East Berlin and Czech demonstrations resulted from the Soviet and Czech "betrayal of socialism". Press and radio have interpreted the 9 June recommendations of the East German Politburo as a return of all rights to capitalists in towns and countryside, and a complete sacrifice of all possibilities of Socialist development in favor of the national interests of Soviet foreign policy.

C. Western reaction:

The West termed the East German riots as a spontaneous outbreak against a regime which had become thoroughly unbearable to the East German people. The West German press almost universally called for unification through free elections for an all-German government. Other Western observers saw the riots as the "beginning of the break-up in the rigid alignment of the cold war", and as a severe "blow to Soviet prestige" and the "peace" campaign. There was extensive speculation as to what measures Moscow might take to maintain its position in East Europe and to keep the riots from spreading to other Satellite countries.